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RHODODENDRON J. H. VAN NESS

Stone Mountain Gardens'
RHODODENDRONS

Handsomest of Flowering Shrubs

¶ A Resume of Their Nature, and Their Growing

By W. E. Bowers
Proprietor

Stone Mountain, Ga

The Beautiful

HYBRID RHODODENDRONS

Hybrid rhododendrons, which are among the most beautiful of shrubs, may be grown in Southern gardens. A finer floral sight is hardly to be imagined when these plants are at the height of their blooming season in May. At any season these handsome evergreens impart a dignity to the general garden setting that is unmatched by any other flowering shrub.

Asiatic Hybrids

The most magnificent rhododendrons are the Asiatic Hybrids. They have been developed by crossing species, most of them native to Asia, which have particularly outstanding qualities both in their growing habits and in the beauty of their blooms. Such expert hybridization has produced flowers which are too lovely to be described — spectacular flower heads (trusses) — many 5 to 6 inches in diameter and in a wide range of clear, bright colors.

Though some varieties have not proved altogether suitable to our climate, those we recommend have flourished despite our severest winters, when the temperature reached zero, and despite several dry, hot summers, when the temperature remained at 90 to 100 degrees for days and, at times, for weeks.

Catawba Hybrids

The Catawba Hybrids spring primarily from species native to our Appalachian mountains which hybridist-nurserymen have crossed with other species. Although very desirable because of their general adaptability, many of them retain a trace of the coloring of the purplish *Catawbiense* species. They are well suited, however, to many locations, and especially are they delightful in a setting predominantly woodland where no bright rose or red colors clash with them.

¶ Hybrid rhododendrons should not be confused with the Rosebay and Catawba rhododendrons growing in the mountains of the Southeast. These wild forms are rarely adapted to culture outside their habitat, or grow attractive enough to justify the effort to transplant them.

RHODODENDRON CULTURE

The important considerations in growing rhododendrons are proper shading, good drainage and a sour soil.

Site and Shelter

Rhododendrons require some shade and will do well in fairly deep shade, although in deep shade the plants grow more upright and do not produce as many blooms. One should try to transplant them in an airy place where there is an interplay of sunlight and shade, as beneath oaks and pines, or at least where the plants are exposed to full sun, in summer, only during the early morning hours and in the late afternoon. The first type of location is preferable, and especially fitting are places sheltered by oaks and pines near streams, ponds, or lakes or in well-drained ravines. One should not plant rhododendrons in any place, as the unprotected corner of a building, which is exposed to drying winds, and especially to cold winter blasts and strong March winds; nor should one plant them on a south slope which likely will become dry and parched in summer, or against a hot, dry wall. Neither should one plant them under or near a shallow-rooted tree, such as a maple, a sweetgum, or a poplar.

Soil

The type of soil in which our native rhododendrons grow is best for Asiatic and Catawba Hybrids. It is well-drained and composed primarily of molding oak leaves and pine needles, and normally has an acidity rating of pH 4.5 to 5.5. In the absence of an adequate supply of such a soil, a suitable medium may always be prepared easily. A mixture of $\frac{1}{3}$ peat, $\frac{1}{3}$ field or garden loam, and $\frac{1}{3}$ fibrous woods mold will serve the average needs, though one may vary somewhat the proportions of the three ingredients as they are practicable to obtain. Good drainage should be assured by the addition of coarse sand up to a proportion of 10 to 15 percent. The greater the amount of peat the more sand one should use, since peat fails to promote good drainage.

Good drainage and satisfactory acid reaction are natural to fibrous woods mold.

If one is ever uncertain of the acidity rating of one's soil, the soil should be tested. The local county agent will perform this service. Only after it is definitely established that chemicals are necessary, should one attempt to correct the soil with chemicals, for they may cause complications harmful, if not fatal, to the plant.

If the acidity rating of the soil is above pH 5.5, spread over the surface of the mulch either 4 to 6 handfuls of aluminum sulphate or 2 to 3 handfuls of sulphur. The amount depends on the size of the plant. Though aluminum sulphate acts more quickly, when used in big doses it proves toxic to the plant. Because the effect of sulphur is longer lasting and is not toxic, sulphur is preferable to aluminum sulphate.

In the event that the soil tests too acid, below pH 4.5, apply a few handfuls of limestone, preferably dolomitic limestone, over the mulch and water it in well.

¶ Blooms of rhododendrons and mollis hybrid azaleas make very effective inside decorations, singly or in the creation of lovely cut-flower arrangements.

Transplanting

Time to Plant — In the Southeast, rhododendrons are best transplanted in the late fall, during winter, and in early spring. The most appropriate time may vary with climatic conditions of the specific area. Planting in September, October and early November is normally to be avoided because of usual autumn dryness, which makes necessary the task of keeping the plants well watered until rainfall is abundant. Spring is ordinarily the best planting season. At that time the conditions of both soil and climate are most favorable. The plants may be in full bloom but should not have begun to grow.

Spacing — As a rule rhododendrons grow rather large and should be planted at least as far as 5 to 6 feet apart and the same distance from other shrubs or trees, and 3 to 4 feet from buildings.

Planting — 1. Dig hole 2 to 3 times larger in diameter than the ball of earth of the plant and, in sandy soils, 2 to 4 inches below its original depth, or in clay soils, 4 to 6 inches.

2. Put enough planting soil in the hole and pack it down firmly so that when the plant is set, its crown (that point where the upper roots extend from the stem) is even with the surface. For attaining this, a narrow board laid across the hole is useful. The burlap need not be removed unless it is of heavy material.

3. Settle the plant firmly by thorough watering. Water twice a week thereafter in the absence of sufficient rain. It is a good idea to improvise some extra shading for a week or so after planting, especially if the weather is sunny.

Mulching — Particularly good mulching materials are rotting leaves and other plant litter found under oaks and pine trees. Fresh oak leaves tend to form a tight mat which hinders soil aeration and ready absorption of water, but they may be used if the leaves are loosened occasionally and if small limbs and branches are laid over them to prevent their being blown away by winds. Should sawdust be used, it should be at least 3 years old and treated with sulphate of ammonia, mixing 1 pint to 1 bushel of sawdust. We do not recommend lawn clippings for mulching rhododendrons, because the material mats and the soft grass decays too rapidly.

About 30 days after planting, allowing time first for the plant to become well anchored, cover the ground under and around the plant with mulch 2 to 3 inches deep, and apply fertilizer (see Fertilizing under MAINTENANCE), and then water the area well.

Acquisition of Plants

Buy rhododendrons from a recognized grower, preferably from a nursery which specializes in growing rhododendrons, or through a landscape planter of known reliability, particularly one who fully appreciates the character of these valuable plants.

Though grafted plants and plants grown on their own roots may be had, rhododendrons grown on their own roots ordinarily are recommended for transplanting in the South.



RHODODENDRON PURPLE SPLENDOR

Maintenance

Mulching — The mulch should be replenished to some extent every year, as its state of decay requires, preferably in late fall. A good mulch aids materially toward maintaining a constant supply of moisture and protects the plant against extreme heat and cold; it also helps to maintain proper acidity of the soil, supplies food to the plant, and discourages the growth of weeds. Never allow the mulch to be removed. The plant's feeding roots are near the surface and they should not be exposed or disturbed.

Watering — Having large leaves and growing near the surface, rhododendrons require more water than most shrubs of equal size. In dry spells during summer the whole root area should be thoroughly irrigated every week or oftener. Frequent syringing, except when hot rays of the sun are directly on the foliage, is very beneficial during the growing season, for it induces bud growth and contributes to the well-being of the plant.

In the fall the watering schedule should be appreciably slackened to allow the plants to harden off, but rhododendrons should not be permitted to enter winter under dry conditions; unless there is ample rainfall the last of November and in December, the plants should be watered generously during that period.

¶ No group of flowering shrubs offers greater possibilities to those who garden as a hobby than hybrid rhododendrons.

Fertilizing — If one grows rhododendrons in soil comprised mostly of woods mold and provides ample mulch, the need for fertilizer is reduced. In any case it is a good practice to apply cottonseed meal, well-rotted cow manure or PlantGro right after the original mulch is laid — that is, about 30 days after the rhododendron was transplanted — and repeated every spring thereafter. One may be guided as to the amount to apply by the relative fertility of the soil and by the size of the plant. It is more dangerous to fertilize too much than too little. Never fertilize after July 1.

Insect Control — Rhododendrons are subject to attack by the azalea lacewing fly and the red spider. Any dust or spray remedy used on azaleas applies to infestations on rhododendrons as well. Frequent syringing in the late afternoon, the water being directed underneath the foliage, will keep them under control. A small beetle, which comes out at night in June and early July, may feed on the new growth of the plant. Spraying with a solution made of calcium arsenate (or arsenate of lead) and dehydrated lime may be used to control this insect. Use 3 to 4 tablespoonfuls each of arsenate and lime to the gallon of water.

Weeding — Any weeds which grow up under the plant should be pulled out, never hoed out.

Flower Removal — After the flowers have wilted they should immediately be broken off.

Tag Girdling — Wired tags, used to identify the variety, should be attached loosely so that the wire will not girdle the stem of the plant as it grows.

Leaf Dropping, Leaf Curling

At times some leaves of a healthy rhododendron plant will turn yellow and drop off. The shedding of some of its foliage is natural to the plant and ordinarily is no cause for alarm. During very cold weather the leaves may curl up and hang down. That behavior, too, is natural to the plant.

HUMOLD

HUMOLD is our well-known humus-forming mold which is used mostly for growing rhododendrons and azaleas, although it is excellent, mixed with topsoil, for growing many other plants. It is chiefly fibrous woodland soil, taken from our oak and pine groves, to which mosspeat has been added to increase its capacity to hold moisture, and enough grit to insure its good drainage.

In planting rhododendrons and azaleas, HUMOLD may be used alone or mixed with an equal amount, or less, of good loamy soil that is free of lime, ashes or mortar.

¶ "Humold has proved for several years an excellent transplanting medium wherever I have used it." —Mrs. Chas. A. C., Atlanta.

DAPHNE ODORA

Daphne Odora is a very unusual and useful evergreen shrub of lustrous green foliage, and does particularly well in shady locations. It makes a compact plant which blooms in February and March, and bears delightfully fragrant, pearl-pink flowers in heads an inch or more across. The flowers withstand severe cold to as low as 15 degrees without protection. The plant eventually grows waist high.

This shrub thrives best in a particularly well-drained situation as on slopes and terraces and should not be used with other plantings which receive frequent waterings, such as azaleas.

Signal success is had with Daphne Odora by growing the plant in a medium consisting of $\frac{1}{3}$ topsoil, $\frac{1}{3}$ woods soil and $\frac{1}{3}$ coarse sand, and fertilized every spring with a light mulching of cow manure.

PLANTGRO RHODODENDRON FERTILIZER

PLANTGRO is a well-balanced, non-toxic fertilizer of our own make, and is evolved from many years of laboratory study of, and practical experience with, the various materials used in fertilizing plants. It contains organic ingredients of compositions best suited to growing rhododendrons, but which, due to their scarcity, are not usually employed in the manufacture of commercial fertilizers.

PLANTGRO carries 4% nitrogen, 6% phosphatic mineral, 8% potash mineral and beneficial minor elements of plantfood. However, the actual readily-available plantfood content of any fertilizer, while very important, is not all-important. Besides considering a fertilizer in terms of its nutritional value, the gardener is wise to be concerned with what effect the fertilizer has on the physical condition of his soil.

The physical functioning of the soil has a profound influence on a plant's response to culture. Some fertilizer materials react to damage the soil's structure. Therefore we have taken care to incorporate in PLANTGRO only those ingredients which have no harmful effects on the physical vigor of the soil.

PLANTGRO is excellent also for growing azaleas, camellias, gardenias, hollies, magnolias, dogwoods, mountain laurel and blueberries.

Directions for applying PLANTGRO are printed on each package.

OUR NURSERY

For many years, in the hope of being instrumental in adding to the beauty and effectiveness of Southern gardens, we have been collecting and testing hundreds of various hybrid rhododendrons and azaleas from many parts of the world. Though such pioneering naturally has been none too easy, complete faith in our undertaking, together with the cooperation of customers who share our enthusiasm, has encouraged us to extend our effort until we have become the recognized leader in the South for furthering the introduction of these unusual plants, which deserve space in Southern gardens.

There remains much for us to learn about rhododendrons, but our continued experimental work and further intimate association with our plantings will increase our comprehension of these remarkably decorative shrubs, and, doubtlessly, will later enable us to offer many fine varieties, other than those currently found suitable, for growing in the South.

¶ Gardeners, visiting our nursery and seeing, for their first time, the hybrid rhododendrons in bloom, exclaimed their reaction with words, in part, like these: ". . . out of this world!" ". . . too beautiful to believe!" ". . . breathtaking!" ". . . kingly flowers!" ". . . really handsome!", and so on.



MOLLIS HYBRID AZALEAS

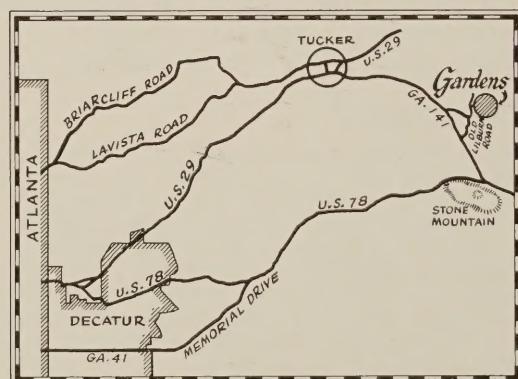
Several years ago we imported representative varieties of the new Mollis Hybrid azaleas. Despite the extremes of heat and cold to which they have been subjected, they have thrived and have elicited astonishment and admiration from all who have seen them in bloom. Their beauty results from both the color and formation of the blooms.

The large single flowers, ranging in many shades of yellow, orange, orange-red, and rose, are clustered in rhododendron-like trusses which make the plant a mass of spectacular color, more striking than the popular flame azalea which grows native on many hill and mountain slopes of the upper Southeast.

The Mollis Hybrids are deciduous, and they bloom in May before new leaves appear, a characteristic which contributes to the attractive mass-effect of their color.

Their culture conforms to that prescribed for azaleas as a whole. The plants grow tall and sturdy, but since they respond well to pruning, just after blooming, the older, taller canes may be cut back about even with the lower growth so as to obtain a broader, bushier plant. They should be spaced not less than 3 feet apart.

Plants which have their own roots have proved more satisfactory than grafted plants.



Visit Stone Mountain Gardens

Our nursery is located 18 miles from Atlanta on the Old Lilburn road in Dekalb county, just 3 miles north of and overlooking the Stone Mountain Memorial. Gardeners are always welcomed.

Principles that govern our operation:

RELIABILITY

QUALITY

KNOW-HOW

STONE MOUNTAIN GARDENS

Stone Mountain, Route 2, Georgia

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